Ar 5/8

gist

NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

AUG 13 1986

A quick reference aid on U.S. foreign relations
Not a comprehensive policy statement
Bureau of Public Affairs • Department of State

U.S. GOVT. PUBS.
DEPOSITORY

Arms Control: Chemical and Biological Weapons July 1986

Background: The US is party to two existing international arms control agreements affecting chemical and biological weapons.

- The Geneva Protocol of 1925 prohibits the use in war of chemical and bacteriological weapons, but not the development, production, possession, or transfer of such weapons. Most major states that are party to the protocol have recorded reservations retaining a right to retaliate in kind if such weapons are used against them.

- The 1972 Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) bans development, production, stockpiling, or possession and transfer of biological agents or toxins "of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective, and other peaceful purposes," and also the weapons, equipment, and means of delivery for agents or toxins.

Spread and use: In February 1985, the President's report on noncompliance with arms control agreements indicated that the Soviet Union had been involved in the production, transfer, and use of trichothecene mycotoxins for hostile purposes in Laos, Kampuchea, and Afghanistan. This was in violation of Soviet obligations under international law as codified in the Geneva Protocol and the BWC. The December 1985 report indicates that although allegations concerning the use of lethal chemicals or toxins in Kampuchea, Laos, or Afghanistan subsided in 1985, there is no basis to amend the February 1985 conclusions. In the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq has used chemical weapons against Iran for the last 3 years.

In 1963, the US believed that five countries possessed chemical weapons. The US now believes at least 15 countries have them and that others are trying to acquire the capability.

Proposed chemical weapons ban: The primary US objective in chemical weapons negotiations is to eliminate such weapons through a comprehensive and verifiable global ban. US-Soviet negotiations on a chemical weapons ban began in 1977 but lapsed in 1980, primarily over differences regarding verification issues.

In 1981 efforts to extend legal restraints on chemical weapons shifted to the 40-nation Conference on Disarmament at Geneva. In 1984 the US gave an important impetus to these talks when Vice President Bush presented a draft treaty text for a comprehensive chemical weapons ban. The US proposal would prohibit the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, retention, transfer, or use of chemical weapons and would require the destruction of all existing chemical weapons stockpiles and production plants. It seeks a complete and verifiable global ban on such weapons. Verification would be accomplished by a combination of national and international measures, including systematic international onsite inspection and mandatory challenge inspection.

READEX FICHE best copy available

S 1.128:

Pending agreement on a complete ban on chemical weapons and to complement efforts to achieve that goal, the US has consulted informally with other countries to discuss ways to optimize existing export control programs on chemicals useful in the manufacture of chemical weapons.

At the November 1985 summit, President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev agreed to intensify bilateral discussions on a chemical weapons treaty in Geneva and to begin a dialogue on preventing proliferation. We have since held two sessions in Geneva on the chemical weapons ban and one session in Bern, Switzerland, on chemical weapons proliferation. We anticipate further US-Soviet discussions on both topics.

The 1984 US draft chemical weapons treaty and our continuing active participation in both multilateral and bilateral talks on a comprehensive chemical weapons ban reflect the US commitment to negotiate a verifiable treaty.

Biological Weapons Convention Review Conference: The 1972 BWC mandated a review conference 5 years after the convention entered into force. The first such conference, in 1980, called for a second review conference between 1985 and 1990. It will be held September 8-26, 1986, in Geneva. The US objective is to ensure a serious review of the operation of the BWC since 1980. The US publicly has raised concerns about Soviet noncompliance. In addition, we expect the conference to address new scientific and technical developments and the impact of these issues on the BWC. The US feels that the norm established by the BWC against the use or possession of such weapons should be strengthened, and it will encourage other states that are parties to the BWC to join us in this effort.

Harriet Culley, Editor (202) 647-1208